

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY SAYS POWER OUTAGE WAS PREVENTABLE, CALLS ON CONGRESS TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES

KINGSTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-22) today issued the following statement in reaction to the massive power outage that hit the northeastern United States and parts of Canada on Thursday:

"Thursday's blackout should be a wake-up call to those in Washington who have stood in the way of efforts to modernize the electricity grid and lessen the burden on it. Year after year we fight the administration and the Republican leadership in Congress over funding for energy efficiency research. This year the president called for cutting those programs by \$85 million. Becoming more energy efficient would obviously reduce the burden on the grid, not to mention the tremendous economic benefits that would result. Instead this administration focuses on finding more opportunities for oil drilling and giving tax cuts to the rich.

"President Bush said yesterday he has maintained all along that the grid needs to be modernized. Yet when my colleagues and I proposed a plan in 2001 that would provide \$350 million for the improvement of power transmission systems the president's allies in Congress killed the idea. Indeed, at every turn Mr. Bush and his friends have blocked our efforts at modernizing the power grid. House Majority Leader Tom Delay called our efforts 'pure demagoguery.' Now watch how fast Delay and his party jump on the bandwagon to improve the grid.

"The deregulation of the electric industry certainly bears some blame for the massive blackout as well. While we don't yet know where this outage began, the system that has resulted from the lifting of regulations has made possible a situation in which an incident in Toronto or Cleveland can cause a blackout from there to New York or vice-versa. Moreover, deregulation has put responsibility for maintenance into the hands of companies whose sole motivation is profit.

"Congress needs to investigate and address this situation immediately. Our vulnerability in this area was on display yesterday for the whole world -including our enemies- to see. We have to act now to prevent even more serious catastrophes in the future."